

Consideration and evaluation of the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site for deaccession

The Natural Resources Commission considered the proposed deaccession of the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site at its May 19, 2010 meeting. The Commission tabled the proposed deaccession until the November, 2010 meeting. See attached excerpt of the May 19, 2010 meeting minutes.

Following the Commission's May meeting, The Friends of Ernie Pyle (FOEP) sent a letter to John Davis, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Lands and Cultural Resources, dated August 1, 2010 describing FOEP's partial plans for operation and promotion of the site. The FOEP asked that the historic site not be deaccessioned.

In a response letter dated September 13th, the Division of Indiana Museum and Historic Sites agreed to work with FOEP. A Facility Use Agreement was signed allowing FOEP to operate the historic site until Dec 31, 2010. The response letter also noted that deaccession was a "vital step" in transitioning ownership to FOEP, and asking for FOEP support. The FOEP was notified that the proposed deaccession would be scheduled for consideration by the Advisory Council at its October 13, 2010 meeting.

The Ernie Pyle State Historic Site provided a driver for a Jeep, at FOEP's request, for use in the Dana Days Parade and the nearby Newport Hill Climb Parade to help market the historic site. Inquiries for tours or to support the historic site have been routinely forwarded to the FOEP. The Ernie Pyle State Historic Site has continued to provide lawn care and pay all utilities in 2010. However, funds have not been allocated for the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site after December 31, 2010. Time is now short to transition the property to FOEP or make other arrangements before the end of the year.

Excerpt from Commission's May 19, 2010 meeting minutes:

INDIANA STATE MUSEUM AND HISTORIC SITES

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Chairman Poynter noted there were several comments cards received for persons wishing to speak on this item. He said due to time constraints, the public comments would be limited to no more than 15 minutes. The Chair then invited Kathy McLary to speak.

Kathleen McLary, representing the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites [ISMHS], addressed the Commission. "We bring you today one more step in the technical deaccession of the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site. We began the research in early 2004, looking at all the historic sites and deciding all of them still need to be in the system, and are there other ways that perhaps we can distribute the information and educate the public. Ernie Pyle was one of those that did come to the surface. As we reduce the staff, trying to reduce the resources going into the historic site, it did not affect the attendance, but the attendance did not go up." In December 2009, the ISMHS began the process of closing historic site and moving information to the Museum for more exposure to the public. McLary said more than 80,000 people have been exposed to the history of Ernie Pyle and his "importance to the world" since opening the new exhibit at the Museum. "Again, very different numbers than what we were seeing in the Dana location. We feel that reason to bring it to the ISMHS, is perhaps justified with those numbers."

Norton Newcomb, representing the Friends of the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site, addressed the Commission. He distributed a three-ring binder with Ernie Pyle information for each Commission members. "At the beginning of the site, which I believe was in 1973, Martha Helt was one of the original Friends, and I think the question came up back in 1973, about his birth place." Helt sought witnesses and provided the letters she had received to Newcomb. "That's pretty much in my research all that I could find that indicted any birth place. I didn't find anything except in that same letter where the witness said that the 'little house' wasn't his birth place." Newcomb said after being notified of the closure of the historic site, the Friends of Ernie Pyle sought an appeal process with the State. "To my knowledge" the appeal is still ongoing. "So, I'd like to ask this Commission to, at the very least, post-pone this. We've retained a lawyer, Scott Craig, because none of us know how to run a business."

Phillip Hess, another member of Friends of Ernie Pyle, addressed the Commission. "I've been a Friend of Ernie Pyle since about 1990, since we went through a fund-raising process to build World War II goods. As Mr. Newton said, our appeal is currently at the Governor's office, so we are moving forward as fast as possible." He said the operating costs for the Dana museum were \$48,000 in 2009. Of that among, \$10,000 was for utilities and \$4,000 for the one employee. "We were open two days a week, 308 hours, about 1/6 of the average operation of the other historic sites in the ISMHS. There is no outside management. They were cut early in the process." He said one of the functions of the outside manager had been to improve the attendance, arrange bus tours, groups, and community outreach. "We had no one for that." Hess said the receipts in addition to donations total approximately \$8,000 for 2009, bringing the net cost to operate the Ernie Pyle site for a year to \$6,000. The Department's budget for historic sites, according to the 2009 financial statement, was \$3.2 million. "So, the portion of Ernie Pyle's loss was less than 2% of the operating budget for the historic sites." The Indiana State Museum quotes \$50,000 as costs, and these are mostly capital costs—"to repair the roof, repairs to the porch, all of which are items that would be typical of any home. We don't anticipate any additional capital costs." He referenced a gift from an estate within the last five years, which was between \$30,000 and \$50,000. "So, even the capital costs have been mitigated by at least 60%. No budget action would even be required, only allocations."

Hess said, "The reason we are appealing was for the State and community as well as our own. We honestly believe that Ernie Pyle is important to the Indiana state history and culture. For you who don't have much background on Ernie Pyle, the notebook that you're looking at was presented to the Governor's committee meeting.... The site is unique within the historic site system. Ernie Pyle is the only representative of the 20th century. In his time, he was important. He always spoke about Indiana and represented the State very well. Dr. Gantz when the site was dedicated in 1998 said it was the best exhibit in the historic site system. We feel that it's a betrayal of trust to close the museum. The American Legion gave over \$100,000 at the onset as well as the Lily endowment. The Elder sisters, who donated the house, flew at least 2,000 miles to be in attendance today. The Scripps Howard Foundation in mid 1990s was a primary benefactor for the WWII exhibits. They gave \$250,000 to the site, which was their largest single gift ever.... It seems wrong to us that [the Ernie Pyle Historic Site] would only last a half generation. The assets were all presented entirely intact and complete to the State with no cost."

Hess concluded by saying he hoped the Pyle exhibit would stay in Dana. "I certainly can't say that we're going to have 70,000 people ever come to Dana in probably five years, but the people who come, come on purpose, and the experience they get is rich and rewarding. Half the people leave in tears. It is a unique site that's well presented. The State shouldn't operate museums for a profit. We honestly believe that the State owes a depth of honor to Ernie Pyle and an obligation of gratitude to the people who made it possible."

Tom Milligan, a farmer who lives near Dana, next addressed the Commission. He said in one of his books, Pyle writes of his first date, which was with Milligan's great aunt. Milligan referenced a 2006 fire that destroyed much of downtown Dana. "That's not the only fire that we've had, and that's not the only thing that has help destroy some of the things in Dana. Every time that we come up against trying to rebuild some of these things, they say 'well, you can't build there. You don't have sanitary sewers in your town.'" But Milligan said "the town leaders have undertaken a \$6 million project of installing a sewer system in Dana. Almost \$1 million of that is coming in direct grant money from the State of Indiana. The rest of it is coming in grant money and loan money from the USDA through rural development. The cornerstone for the redevelopment is the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site. It just seems rather foolish for the State on one hand to be putting a million dollars to the

redevelopment of a small community, and, on the other hand, the crumbs off your table is all it would take to keep the state historic site alive and be the cornerstone of that redevelopment of a small community. I really think we are turning the corner in our community. I'm also a member of the Newport Chemical Depot Reuse Authority. That is what we have pinned our hopes on to do something."

Milligan added, "I was with the Governor last fall when he announced 500 new jobs coming to the Depot. It's taken longer than what we had thought, but I think we're having a job fair for the Parsons Mason Hanger Employees to redevelop the army base, which is right on the edge of Dana." He continued, "Look at what a beautiful thing this is. One of the challenges that we face in bringing employment and investment to our community is the quality of our community and the pull of support for the historic site, for the Ernie Pyle site. The timing is just not right. I would just ask, at least, that you delay this to see it through what the Town of Dana, what we're doing at Newport, what we're doing within our communities can rebuild this community and use the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site as a cornerstone for some of that development."

Joannie Rumble, a Dana resident, addressed the Commission. "Naturally, I'm interested in what takes place with the Ernie Pyle site. I've been a tour guide there for many years, and I would like to address a question—if you have been to the Ernie Pyle site and have viewed the memorabilia and the artifacts there? Each of you perhaps had a family member that is a past or present WWII veteran and [are] aware of his writings. He brought that home describing to the fullest what our boys were doing for our country. I want to continue the generations that we have coming before us in the future—my children, my grandchildren, and yours—in learning about Ernie Pyle."

The Chair thanked everyone who came to speak on the Ernie Pyle issue. "I know this has been going on for a long time—this conversation about the future of Ernie Pyle's home."

The Vice Chair, Jane Ann Stautz, asked if there were contracts, bequests, or guidelines to the bequests, with regard to contributions made to the Ernie Pyle Historic Site.

Kathleen McLary replied, "No, there were not." The grantors she consulted were "sad, but then they understand with today's economy and today's reality, things move on."

The Chair reflected, "There is no disrespect" for "the integrity of what Ernie Pyle has meant to the State of Indiana and certainly the fact that Indiana wants to keep these items here in the State of Indiana. But are you happy with process that you have been given to this point? Have you been offered to take the site?"

Norton Newcomb replied, "I think I kind of addressed that. We've been in contact with the local board. It's not that we're disinterested. It's that we're clueless on how to run a museum. Until we get through that process, it seems a little fast. I'm not dissatisfied, but I'm ignorant."

The Chair said the Advisory Council reviewed the issue during its April meeting. "I know Pat Early and his group had a look at this. What we've been asked to consider and do today should not eliminate future conversations that could take place about the continued operation and where that home may end up with the Ernie Pyle exhibit and his memorabilia, as I understand it."

Stautz asked about the status of exhibits. "Are they still there? Have some of them been transferred to the Indiana State Museum?"

McLary replied that artifacts remain at the Ernie Pyle Historic Site. "It is normal procedure to rotate artifacts, and we agree with the process. If we do find an organization, whether the Friends or another organization, which would take on the organization, we would continue to work with them to keep rotating the artifacts, conservation-wise, to keep them intact."

Klein asked, "Are the numbers being represented here correct and accurate? Are we talking \$8,000 net or \$6,000 net?"

McLary replied, "That includes the gift shop proceeds."

Klein continued, "I certainly don't want to dismiss some other options that may come out of additional dialog," particularly considering the relatively modest savings that would result.

The Chair commented, "Well said."

Pat Early asked how long it would be before the DNR ceased managing the site if the Commission approved the deaccession today.

John Davis responded, "Right now, the doors are locked and have been since December 31st. We have to have this deaccession to either liquidate the property or to convey it to Vermillion County, the Town of Dana, the Friends of Ernie Pyle, or any other arrangement we would make to keep the site open, but not under state operation. We need to have deaccession happen. There's no hurry on deaccession. Deaccession doesn't change anything right now today. We're in a mode where we're going through the process." He added that he has had conversations with the Newport Chemical Depot Reuse Authority.

Early sought clarification regarding addressing the future of the property, and asked, "We have to go through the deaccession process is that correct?"

Davis replied, "It's not totally correct. We have been in discussion with some people, but I think they would say that their focus has been on changing our minds about the State running it, rather than pursuing a cooperative agreement, where they run it, or somebody else runs it, or we turn it over to them. I think they have felt like they wanted to try and do this first process. So, we've been talking to them about 'Yes, why don't you take it? Why don't you run it?' In fact, DNR even agreed to let the name 'Ernie Pyle State Historic Site' remain the same."

Early continued, "We're not trying to profit from this site in any way shape or form? We're more than willing to turn the site over to the local community or the Friends, or whatever. To us, this is strictly that the site really doesn't draw many visitors, and even though it's not a big budgetary amount, this is one of these things where we have to look at the cost-benefit of anything we do. We're saying we get significant visitation in the State Museum and the artifacts are available to see, but we're only drawing between 1,000 and 1,500 people at the Dana site, and that's why this is all under consideration."

Davis answered, "That's exactly right. This is the last of what I would term a 'tier of properties' that included Pigeon Roost, which we surplused to Scott County and the Wilbur Wright Memorial in Henry County, which we transferred to a Friends group. Your analysis is correct."

Klein reflected, "I've heard two things here that kind of bang around in my head. First, is that we're moving too fast. Secondly, they're not ready for it. It didn't mean they were opposed, but they're not ready for it. The guy said they're 'clueless' as to how to run it. So, those two things are similar in nature and character. Deaccession sounds somewhat final to me. I don't know."

The Chair observed, "As the Commission, we have the responsibility to look at this type of issue. It has been a long process. There has been a formal process followed.... This does not end a conversation—whether they may be ready today. It's my understanding that Dana doesn't want any financial responsibility for this, is that true?"

Hess replied, "Yes, sir. That's true. They have no finances at all."

The Chair said, "Okay, so my point is, that doesn't end a conversation. What we're saying is at the end of the day, this is an important issue for Dana and for the citizens and those that work there. No one is disregarding the fact that this is an important issue. Please be clear on that. It has gone through a formal process that dates back to at least 2007. There have been meetings at the highest levels. The issue that John Davis brought up is that the process will continue to be evolving.... It ends up on our agenda not by accident. It ends up on our agenda as a result of a series of other things. They have met...with the Director of the Department. They have met with the Governor's office. They have met with the Natural Resources Advisory Council, all of whom have worked with them to offer alternatives. I believe those alternatives aren't going away.... The Museum

has offered to work with you..., and there has been a collaborative cooperative effort. This process is a finalization of a step in the game, but it does not mean the Ernie Pyle site goes away and is sold next Monday at an auction. I think every intention is to keep this site some place by some caretaker whenever they're ready. I would assume that the State Museum would work with them as long as those conversations go. The question at hand is whether the State of Indiana keeps this. Through that formalized process, even from reading from the minutes from the Advisory Council on April 14, it does not make sense. There has been resistance from the Town or from the Friends Group to take this as offered, but that might change in the future. I wouldn't know how to run a museum either, but it's important to them, and I think the willingness on both sides to continue to work together is the important part here."

Mark Ahearn said he found "Mr. Newcomb's testimony somewhat compelling in the sense of 'We're not quite ready to catch the ball.' The local folks that are supporters recognize... that if something doesn't change, the clock is running against the property in Dana staying in the same position that it is. If the worse that happens is we don't get hit with capital costs, and defer a decision, we're out \$8,000."

Ahearn continued, "There's sort of a rule in politics that says, 'when you're explaining, you're losing.' I don't know that there's any good way for a Commission member to explain this other than through lengthy continued discussion, but to the world it looks like the State of Indiana is decoupling itself from Ernie Pyle. I'm not sure that's necessarily the position that we want to take on behalf of the rest of the State of Indiana. We're the State of Indiana's special body created by statute that does this. I don't have any particular good warm fuzzy feel about taking that action now. "

The Chair reflected, "Nicely done."

Phil French said, "However we would work it out, the fact of the matter is it doesn't matter whether its \$6,000 of Ernie Pyle, or its \$6,000 of inefficient light bulbs, or its toilet paper for the State. We can't choose. That's what we're here to do. That's what the State is here to do. We can create flexibility, and however it works, we move forward to a deaccession plan but give them a little bit of a sunset time. However it works out, they've got to understand that we're for them. However it works out. I agree it's compelling. You weren't ready to catch the ball, but you've got to be ready to catch the ball. I don't agree with just moving this forward. I think we've got an obligation to move forward but also create a little flexibility."

Ahearn stated, "I agree with you, Phil. I'm not challenging your thinking. But Tom Brokaw didn't write a story about light bulbs. He wrote about the 'greatest generation'. There's something historically significant to this. I think the concept is 'You've got to get ready to catch the ball', and 'When might you be ready?' For what it is, I'd be of a mind frame that we ought to bleed some more time into this decision."

French replied, "I agree whole-heartedly."

Early said, "If we table it, we're going to end up in the same place a year from now or three months from now. They're not ready to take it. In any form of a motion, I have no problem adding a time-frame to it, but I think that the motion would be something along the lines of 'we are going to deaccess this property, you have twelve months to determine whether or not you can go ahead and take the property over,' or whatever a reasonable time-frame is so that we don't end up having another deaccession vote. We're just putting a time-frame on the vote that we're taking."

The Chair asked McLary, "Does it create a problem for the State Museum to do something along those lines?"

McLary replied, "No, it does not."

Stautz asked whether the "State has agreed to pay utilities for period of time?"

McLary answered, "Through this calendar year."

Ahearn said, "Let's move the decision out further. Everybody knows what the stakes are."

Klein moved to table the deaccession vote and to first discuss what the policy is.

Ahearn asked, "If I could offer an amendment to table it until May of 2011."

Klein consented to Ahearn's amendment.

The Chair said, "There's a motion on the table that has been amended for consideration that this agenda item be tabled until the May meeting of 2011."

Davis reflected, "I think there are a few things that we're overlooking. One is that we're closed right now so we're paying utilities we've committed until the end of the year. To go until May 2011 is going to create a holding pattern."

The Vice Chair said, "If the utilities are paid through the end of the year that would give time to work through the options with the various groups, again based on the fact that there is the budget consideration of the utilities."

The Chair asked Stautz, "You're suggesting a deferral would be until our November meeting?"

Stautz confirmed, "Yes."

The Chair recognized Phillip Hess.

Hess stated, "The process that we were asking to be considered was not solely deaccession but also reopen. We honestly believe that the DNR and the state historic site fit where they should be. They deserve to be where they were." He asked the Commission to hear from two gentlemen who drove from Columbus, Ohio—one from the Howard Scripps Foundation and the other from the American Legion. "The fact is that if we're not able to stay within the State Historic Site system, disposition is something we'll face when we have to. We really believe that we deserve to be open as a part of the Indiana State Historic Site system. That's the petition that we have pursued to the Governor's office, and we're waiting for his decision."

Ahearn reflected, "Now, we're having a different discussion, a philosophical discussion. Does it stay in or does it go out? I don't think it changes my thinking.... I don't know if I'm ready to vote it off the State system yet."

The Chair continued, "There is a motion to table this issue until the Commission meeting of May 2011. Is there a second? The Chair hears no second to that motion. Does someone offer a different motion for consideration?"

Stautz moved to defer deaccessioning action until the November 2010 meeting to allow additional time for the State and represented parties of interest to explore their options.

Early requested clarification, and asked, "But not to reopen [the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site]?"

Stautz said her motion did not include reopening the property.

The Chair said, "The motion I hear is that this issue is tabled until the November 2011 meeting with no action being taken until then."

Stautz replied, "Yes, except for ongoing dialogue and discussion as to what the options might be."

The Chair then asked for any discussion to Vice Chair Stautz's motion.

French seconded the motion.

The Chair called the question. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried. Klein abstained.

The Chair recognized Mike Harden.

Harden said, "I just wanted to make the point that from July 8 to July 11 in Bloomington, there will probably be 150 to 180 members of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists for their annual convention here in Indiana. Our patron saint is Ernie. He was the greatest columnist the nation produced during the 20th Century. He was most important at one of its most arduous and strenuous times. What I want time to do is to seek recruits among the Midwestern columnists who would be willing to volunteer."

Harden continued, "I thank you for giving us the time to explore the option with Indiana University, Ernie's alma mater, of creating an internship that would send down to Dana so that they would know what the Hoosier State gave American Journalism and be able to interpret that for however many people come there. Those are two things that I hope will make you feel a little better about the decision you made, that options are being explored."

Steve Short then addressed the Commission. "I'm not just representing the American Legion today. I'm here on behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Amvets, and the Disabled American Veterans for Indiana. We are solidly against closing the Dana facility and against it leaving the offices of the Indiana Historic Site program." He said 250,000 veterans and their families "were also solidly against closing the facility. Ernie wasn't technically a veteran, but he gave his life for his country. We, as veterans, recognize that; and we think it would be a travesty to lose that site."

The Chair thanked Short for his services. "We appreciate that."

Background information provided to Commission at May 2010 meeting:

The Ernie Pyle State Historic Site was established in 1976 and is located in Dana, Vermillion County, Indiana. The site consists of the house from the farm where Ernie Pyle was born, the visitor center (two linked, reconstructed WWII era Quonset huts) which house exhibits, gift shop and library and maintenance garage. The site memorializes the life of war correspondent, Ernie Pyle and his Pulitzer Prize winning works documenting the lives of soldiers during WWII. The site is not on the National Register of Historic Places because the house was moved from its original location thus does not illustrate the original setting or appearance. The Greek revival architecture of the house is of note. The property's location in Dana, Indiana, means that there is ready access to utilities. A sewage treatment facility is currently planned with municipal sewers eventually replacing the individual septic systems in the town.

The house has been extensively researched because of controversy arising from the documentation (and lack thereof) of Ernie Pyle's birth in the actual structure. Currently, there are two schools of thought on the subject, one as adamant as the other. One of the previous site managers completed his Master's Thesis on this subject, finding no primary documents neither proving nor disproving either theory. Thus, there is not sufficient historic significance to justify the costs of continued rehabilitation and maintenance.

Fiscal concerns have been mounting with the historic site since 1996, a year after the opening of the Visitor Center. In the last five years, visitation has hovered between 1,000 and 1,800 visitors per year with revenue averaging \$7,200. Both of these numbers are three times less than any other State Historic Site. Factoring in approximately \$50,000 in capital costs over the same time period, the cost per visitor is extremely high. Reduction in operating hours has not had significant impact on the number of annual visitors or revenue.

One of the main factors affecting the visitation and revenue is the site's remote location. Dana is not on a major interstate nor is it within convenient driving distance of one. An unfortunate fire in 2006 burned more than ½ of its downtown area and the town has not recovered. Far more visitors can be exposed (approximately 70,000) to Ernie Pyle's life work through incorporation into the Indiana State Museum's permanent exhibits.

For the reasons stated, the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site is recommended for deaccession. As is standard practice for the division, an arrangement with a non-profit group is being pursued to take over operational duties. The obvious choice is the Friends of Ernie Pyle, the site's support organization. The Friends group was offered the site in December, 2009, with final determination still pending. Should the group decline and none other steps in, the division will pursue appropriate disposition.

Code Authority

IC 14-20-1-15

The director may, with the approval of the commission, adopt rules under IC 4-22-2 to administer [the State Museums and Historic Sites].

IC 14-20-1-23 (b)

The commission may, on recommendation of the trustees, sell, lease or exchange historic property administered by the department under IC 4-20-5-7 or IC 5-22-22.

Under 14-20-1-15, the following Indiana Administrative Code apply:

312 IAC 24-3-5 Procedure for authorization by the department for deaccession of historic property.

Sec. 5 (a) Before historic property is deaccessioned, the trustees shall consider and evaluate the property according to the factors contained in section 6 of this rule. The trustees shall not recommend that a property be deaccessioned except during a public meeting of the trustees. An opportunity shall be provided to any interested person to comment in writing or during the public meeting concerning whether the property should be deaccessioned. No employee of the department may be disciplined or otherwise sanctioned by the department because the employee exercises the opportunity to comment provided under this subsection.

(b) If the trustees determine to recommend that the historic property be deaccessioned, the recommendation shall be submitted to the commission for final action of the department.

© The commission may direct that a public hearing be conducted for final action that is taken under subsection (b).

(d) If the final action of the commission is to deaccession the historic property, that determination shall be referred by the secretary of the commission to the Indiana department of administration for disposition of the property.

312 IAC 24-3-6 Factors for evaluating historic property

Sec. 6. In evaluating whether historic property administered by the division should be deaccessioned, the department shall consider the following factors:

- (1) Whether the property illustrated, interprets, or is identified with an important aspect of Indiana history or prehistory.
- (2) Whether the property duplicates another state historic site administered by the department.
- (3) Whether the property retains its original appearance, setting and materials.
- (4) Whether the property has sufficient historical significance to justify the costs of continued rehabilitation and maintenance.
- (5) Whether the property is readily accessible to the public.
- (6) Whether the property has ready access to utilities.
- (7) Whether the property currently generates or could generate future revenues.
- (8) Other factors which promote the purposes of IC 14-20-1 and this article.